IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows. The claims, as pending in the subject application, read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the method comprising:

adding one of a plurality of ~~a~~ self-describing attribute tags to said at least one meta-data element, ~~wherein each~~ said self-describing attribute tag ~~added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which the~~ indicating whether said meta-data element, and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from a further ~~another~~ digital image ~~are to~~ should be retained or discarded[[,]] in a case that ~~where~~ the two images are combined, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data elements.

2. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates ~~that the manner of retention is~~ that the meta-data elements in question should both be discarded in a case where the two images are combined.

3. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates ~~that the manner of retention is~~ that the meta-data elements in question should both be retained individually in a case where the two images are combined.

4. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that ~~the manner of retention is that~~ the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded in a case where the two images are combined.

5. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no self describing attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default self describing attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no self describing attribute tag.

6. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 5, wherein the default self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates ~~that the manner of retention is~~ that the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded in a case where the images are combined.

7. (Currently Amended) A method of augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the method comprising:

adding one of a plurality of ~~a~~ self describing attribute tags to said at least one meta-data element, ~~wherein each~~ said self-describing attribute tag ~~added to a meta-data element describes~~ indicating whether ~~a manner of retention in which a corresponding~~ said

meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded in the case where the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

8. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that ~~the manner of retention is that~~ the meta-data element[[s]] in question should be discarded in a case where the image is transformed.

9. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the self describing attribute tag is a tag which indicates that ~~the manner of retention is that~~ the meta-data element[[s]] in question should be retained ~~individually~~ in a case where the image is transformed.

10. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in clam 8, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default self describing attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

11. (Currently Amended) A method of combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith ~~an~~ one of a plurality of attribute tags which ~~describes~~ indicate whether ~~a manner of retention~~

~~in which the~~ corresponding meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded in a case where the images are combined, the method comprising the steps of:

reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify ~~the manner of retention in which~~ whether the corresponding meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded; and

combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and retaining or discarding the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements, depending on the attribute tags corresponding to those meta-data elements.

12. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that ~~the manner of retention is that~~ the meta-data elements in question should be discarded in a case where the images are combined.

13. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that ~~the manner of retention is that~~ the meta-data elements in question should be retained ~~individually~~ in the [[a]] case ~~where~~ that the images are combined.

14. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the attribute tag[[s]] is a tag which indicates that ~~the manner of retention is that~~ the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in the ~~a~~ case ~~where~~ that their values ~~of the meta-data elements~~ are the same, else ~~and~~ discarded in the ~~a~~ case ~~where~~ that the images are combined.

15. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 11, wherein in the event the ~~an~~ image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method ~~further~~ comprises the step of:

supplying a default attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

16. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the default attribute tag is a tag which indicates that ~~the manner of retention is that~~ the meta-data elements in question should be retained as a single element in a case where values of the meta-data elements are the same, and discarded, in a case where the images are combined.

17. (Currently Amended) A method of retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith ~~an~~ one of a plurality of attribute tags which ~~describes a manner of retention in which~~ indicate whether the meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded in a case where the image is transformed, the method comprising the steps of:

reading the attribute tag of the meta-data element to identify ~~the manner of retention in which~~ whether the meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded; and

retaining the meta-data element of the image ~~in accordance with~~ depending on the attribute tag corresponding to the meta-data element, wherein the retention of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

18. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the at least one attribute tag includes ~~is~~ a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data element[[s]] in question should be discarded in the ~~a~~ case that ~~where~~ the image is transformed.

19. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein the attribute tag is a tag which indicates that the manner of retention is that the meta-data element in question should be retained in a case where the image is transformed.

20. (Previously Presented) A method as claimed in claim 17, wherein in the event the image has associated therewith a meta-data element having no attribute tag, then the method further comprises the step of:

supplying a default attribute tag to the meta-data element which has no attribute tag.

21. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the apparatus comprising:

a processor for adding one of a plurality of ~~a~~ self-describing attribute tags to said at least one meta-data element, ~~wherein each~~ said self-describing attribute tag ~~added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which a~~ indicating whether said meta-data element and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from another digital image ~~are to~~ should be retained or discarded in a case where the two images are

combined, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data elements.

22. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the apparatus comprising:

a processor for adding one of a plurality of ~~a~~ self describing attribute tags to said at least one meta-data element, ~~wherein each~~ said self-describing attribute tag ~~added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which the~~ indicating whether said meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded in the ~~a~~ case ~~where~~ that the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

23. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith an attribute tag which ~~describes a manner of retention in which~~ indicates whether the corresponding meta-data element is to be retained or discarded in a case where the images are combined, the apparatus comprising:

a reading device that reads the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify ~~the manner of retention in which~~ whether the corresponding meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded; and

a processor for combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and for retaining or discarding the combined meta-data

elements and one or more further meta-data elements depending on the attribute tags associated with those meta-data elements.

24. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith one of a plurality of ~~an~~ attribute tags which ~~describes a manner of retention in which~~ indicate whether the corresponding meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded in the ~~a~~ case where the image is transformed, the apparatus comprising:

a reading device that reads the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify ~~the manner of retention in which~~ whether the corresponding meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded; and

a processor for retaining each meta-data element of the image ~~in accordance with~~ depending on the attribute tag of each corresponding meta-data element, wherein the retention of each meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

25. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the computer program comprising:

code for adding one of a plurality of ~~a~~ self-describing attribute tags to at least one meta-data element, ~~wherein each~~ said self-describing attribute tag ~~added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which the~~ indicating whether said meta-data element and a corresponding similarly identified meta-data element from a

further ~~another~~ digital image ~~are to~~ should be retained are discarded in the ~~a~~ case that ~~where~~ the two images are combined, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data elements is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.

26. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for augmenting meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the meta-data comprises at least one meta-data element, the computer program comprising:

code for adding one of a plurality of a self describing attribute tags to at least one meta-data element, ~~wherein each~~ said self-describing attribute tag ~~added to a meta-data element describes a manner of retention in which the~~ indicating whether said meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded in the ~~a~~ case that ~~where~~ the digital image is transformed, wherein the retention or discarding of the meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of the meta-data element.

27. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for combining meta-data associated with a plurality of images, wherein the images each have associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one corresponding meta-data element having associated therewith ~~an~~ one of a plurality of attribute tags which ~~describes a manner of retention in which~~ indicate whether the corresponding meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded in ~~a~~ the case that ~~where~~ images are combined, the computer program comprising:

code for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify ~~the manner of retention in which~~ whether the corresponding meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded; and

code for combining one or more similar meta-data elements associated with the images, and retaining or discarding the combined meta-data elements and one or more further meta-data elements, depending on the attribute tags associated with those meta-data elements.

28. (Currently Amended) A computer-readable medium including a computer program for retaining meta-data associated with a digital image, wherein the image has associated therewith meta-data comprising at least one meta-data element having associated therewith ~~an~~ one of a plurality of attribute tags which ~~describes a manner of retention in which~~ indicate whether the meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded in ~~a~~ the case ~~where~~ that the image is transformed, the computer program comprising:

code for reading the attribute tag of each meta-data element to identify ~~the manner of retention in which~~ whether the meta-data element ~~is to~~ should be retained or discarded; and

code for retaining each meta-data element of the image ~~in accordance with~~ depending on the attribute tag associated with each meta-data element, wherein the retention of each meta-data element is dependent on the configuration of each meta-data element.